



# THE NEW FACE OF America

For the first time, more minorities are being born in the U.S. than whites. What does that mean for the nation's identity?

BY VERONICA MAJEROL

**J**essica Ramirez was born to a Colombian mother and a Mexican father. But growing up in Phoenix, Arizona, she rarely thought of herself as a minority.

"I felt that I was equal," says Ramirez, who is now 22 and a senior at Arizona State University. "The school I went to was predominantly Latino. . . . So I just felt that I was normal."

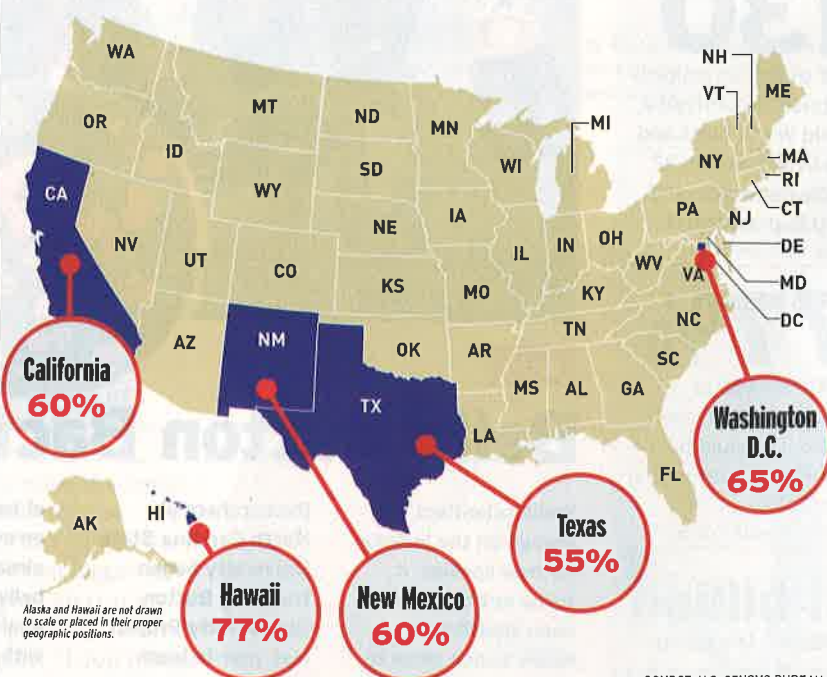
Ramirez's story is indicative of a massive demographic shift under way in the United States: The Census Bureau announced last spring that minority births—Hispanic, black, Asian, American Indian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and Alaska Native—now outnumber those of non-Hispanic whites.

The shift is monumental for a nation that was founded by white English-speaking Europeans, and has long wrestled with issues of race and ethnicity

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## Where Minorities Are a Majority

In four states plus Washington, D.C., non-whites make up more than 50 percent of the population



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

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predominantly Latino. . . .  
So I just felt that I was normal."**

**-JESSICA RAMIREZ, 22**





## Movers & Shakers

From government and business to entertainment, minorities are playing an increasingly prominent role in American life



**Barack Obama**  
First African-American president



**Sonia Sotomayor**  
First Hispanic Justice on the Supreme Court



**Steve Chen**  
Taiwanese-American cofounder of YouTube



**Mindy Kaling**  
First Indian American to star in and write her own sitcom.

and engaged in highly charged debates over immigration. It also has broad implications for the country's economy, its political life, and its identity.

"This is an important tipping point," says William H. Frey, the senior demographer at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C. He describes the change as a "transformation from a mostly white baby-boomer culture to the more globalized multiethnic country that we are becoming."

### 'Majority-Minority' Nation

Minorities already make up the majority of the population in four states, plus Washington, D.C. (see map, p. 6). The same is true in some major U.S. cities, including New York, Las Vegas, and Memphis. But unlike in decades past, minority populations are no longer concentrated in major urban centers: They now outnumber whites in 348 of the more than 3,000 counties across the U.S.

Whites still make up the majority (63 percent) of the U.S. population. But by 2042, minorities are on pace to collectively outnumber whites, according to Census Bureau estimates (see graph, facing page). And the change is happening even faster among younger Americans: By 2020, whites will likely make up less than half of the under-18 population.

Several factors have contributed to the shift. First, in the last three decades,

immigration to the U.S. has been highest from countries like Mexico, China, India, and the Philippines—a result of the 1965 Immigration Act, which opened the doors more widely to immigrants from countries outside Europe. Second, non-whites have higher birth rates than whites. And finally, the white population in the U.S. is getting older, and older people tend to have fewer children.

Social changes are also driving the shift. The number of mixed-race marriages—and, as a result, mixed-race children—is on the rise: Multiracial and multiethnic Americans are among the fastest growing demographic groups in

**Students at San Jose State University in California; half the workers in Silicon Valley are now Asian.**



the U.S., with 9 million people identifying as mixed race on the 2010 Census, a 32 percent increase from 2000.

No country in the world has ever experienced such a quick and dramatic racial and ethnic change. So it's still unclear what it will mean for the U.S. to become a "majority-minority" nation with a large generational divide—a younger generation that's racially and ethnically diverse and an older generation that's largely white.

"The question is," says Marcelo Suarez-Orozco, codirector of immigration studies at New York University, whether a cohesive society is still possible "when the generations don't look like one another."

The country's changing demographics have also put pressure on the two major political parties to address issues of concern to minorities, especially Latinos. Democrats have generally supported immigration reform and a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants—positions that helped President Obama win re-election in November. An estimated 12.5 million of the 24 million eligible Hispanic voters cast ballots, with 71 percent voting for Obama, according to exit polls. By 2030, the number of eligible Hispanic voters could rise to 40 million, and both parties are taking notice. After Mitt

# America's Changing Face 1950 to 2050



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU; Note: In 1950, the Census Bureau had just two categories; for 2011 and 2050, numbers may add up to more than 100 because Hispanics may also report a race, such as white, black, or Asian.

Romney's loss, Republicans began reassessing their positions on immigration. The party "needs messages and policies that appeal to a broader audience," says Mark McKinnon, a former strategist for President George W. Bush.

"I think the 2012 presidential election gives us a sneak peek of what's going to happen in the presidential elections ahead," says Frey. "Hispanics are going to . . . have more say."

Not everyone, however, has embraced America's changing demographics. From 2010 to 2011, more than 150 anti-immigration laws were passed by state legislatures, according to *Mother Jones* magazine. Efforts have also been made over the years to establish English as the country's official national language, with the intent of preserving a unified culture. (Currently, English is the de facto national language.)

## What Would Ben Franklin Say?

And at a time when the economy is everyone's number one concern, there's still great resistance to letting engineers and other highly skilled workers—many from Asia—into the U.S., even though most economists say they would help create more jobs for Americans.

In some ways, these issues are as old as the nation itself. In the 18th century, Benjamin Franklin feared that his fellow white Pennsylvanians—largely of British stock—would be overwhelmed by

Germans, who "will soon so outnumber us, that all the advantages we have will not in my opinion be able to preserve our language, and even our government will become precarious."

And in the 19th and 20th centuries, a solidly Protestant U.S. was wary of the influx of Catholics and Jews. Indeed, the Irish, Italians, and Eastern Europeans who arrived in droves were

diverse cultural makeup gives the U.S. an edge over other countries.

"We in this country have a history of bringing in people from other parts of the world," he says. "That's still a part of our DNA as a society that puts us ahead of other parts of the world where they have real difficulties in assimilating people."

For many younger people, the notion of a less race-conscious America is already

**'People our age don't care where you're from.' —MOISES MORALES, 23, who moved to the U.S. from Mexico at age 12**



not universally considered white.

But who will consider themselves Hispanic, black, or white later this century? With the upward trend in inter-ethnic and interracial marriages, ethnic and racial definitions may be different in 20 or 30 years from what they are today.

"The idea that you're Hispanic and you can marry someone that's Asian, what does that mean a couple of generations down the road?" asks Frey.

Today, the Census Bureau considers Hispanic an ethnicity, not a race. And in 2000, after years of complaints, it began allowing Americans to check off more than one box to designate race.

Frey also believes that in this increasingly globalized world, the country's

a reality. Moises Morales, 23, moved to the U.S. from Mexico when he was 12. He says that when he started high school, he initially had only Latino friends. But pretty soon, he was hanging out with blacks, Asians, whites, and people of other ethnicities.

"That's when I started realizing that people our age don't really care where you're from," he says. "How cool is it that you can say you experienced the Mexican culture, the African-American culture, the Chinese culture, and you also get to experience the American culture?" •

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